

# **NATO: Potential Sources of Tension**

**Joseph R. Wood**

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USAF Institute for National Security Studies  
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Director, USAF Institute for National Security Studies

2354 Fairchild Drive, Suite 5L27

phone: 719-333-2717

email: inss@usafa.af.mil

<http://www.usafa.af.mil/inss>



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Executive Summary	ix
Preface	xiii
Introduction	1
A Note on Focus	5
Broader Sources of Tension	6
Geography	7
French Independence	10
A Complex of Related Issues and Stresses: The Purpose of NATO, American Presence, and European Integration	13
Relations with Russia	16
Particular Issues and Sources of Tension	17
Enlargement	17
Issues in the Strategic Concept Review	22
Cost Issues: Spending Without a Threat	26
An Illustrative Scenario	28
ESDI, the Western European Union, and France	30
Counter-Proliferation and Terrorism	32
The U.S.-Allied Technology Gap and Interoperability	33
Adaptation Issues	33
Greece and Turkey	34
A Note on the Balkans	35
Concluding Note	36
Endnotes	38



## FOREWORD

We are pleased to publish this twenty-third volume in the *Occasional Paper* series of the US Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). As we approach NATO's fiftieth anniversary and a crucial NATO summit, INSS offers two studies that address the state of the alliance and critical issues that it must face if it is to survive its Cold-War roots. In this study, Joseph R. Wood's *Occasional Paper 23, NATO: Potential Sources of Tension*, the focus is on the range of issues, large and small, that comprise the NATO agenda in this golden anniversary year. The paper does an excellent job of presenting both the issues and the political-economic-military context in which they must be addressed. In the accompanying follow-on study, David S. Fadok's *Occasional Paper 24, Juggling the Bear*, one of the most thorny of those issues—NATO expansion to include Russia—is examined in exhaustive detail. Together these two studies, written by two extremely talented and rising minds within the USAF today, present a fitting intellectual tribute to perhaps history's most successful alliance as they develop the issues upon which hinge its future prospects for success.

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JAMES M. SMITH  
Director



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NATO's history has been characterized as one of continuing crisis and division, overcome only by a combination of compelling need on one hand, and constant attention and statesmanship on the other. By contrast, 1999 marks a period of relative internal calm for the Alliance. From the U.S. Senate's overwhelming approval of NATO enlargement to the fact that Germany's Green Party was forced to mute anti-NATO views even to be considered a potential government coalition partner, substantial concrete evidence suggests that NATO today is not in obvious crisis, is threatened neither by a powerful external threat nor by overarching internal strategic differences, and enjoys a degree of support that may indeed be higher than during the Cold War.

Nevertheless, there are potential sources of strain and tension within the Alliance. They do not immediately pose grave threats to Alliance cohesion, but they could grow into significant strains if not handled effectively. Moreover, several of the strains collectively have the potential to interact in ways that could introduce more serious tensions, especially with the imposition of other, unanticipated kinds of tension or crisis.

Several long-term tensions that existed during the Cold War continue to affect NATO today. The first is geography, which affects the policy of each Ally according to how that Ally perceives its own interests and its proximity to potential security problems. The second is the French exception and France's interpretation of and value on its national independence. The third is a collection of issues that spring from the question of what are the real purposes of the Alliance. Collective defense against an external enemy? Protection of shared interests in Europe? Shaping the European security environment? Preventing renationalization of defense while furthering European

integration? The last long-term tension involves differing perspectives on the Western relationship with Russia.

The short- and medium-term issues inducing stress in the Alliance today include the following:

- Enlargement: Most Allies favor a pause in enlargement after the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland join in 1999. But the Alliance will have to evaluate how long to pause and what candidates are next if its “open door” policy is to be effective.

- Strategic Concept Review: As the Alliance reviews its Strategic Concept for the first time since 1991, it must decide to what degree to emphasize traditional, core Article 5 missions or whether to emphasize the flexibility some think necessary to deal with more frequent non-Article 5 missions.

- Cost Issues: A major problem for the Alliance is how to sustain support for defense resources absent a large and looming threat. This absence could allow domestic political forces in all Allied countries more room to assert themselves and use NATO as a tool for domestic purposes; a hypothetical example that illustrates the problem is how the Air Force transition to Air Expeditionary Forces could have an eventual, unintended impact on U.S. European presence and on the larger Alliance. There are also significant issues associated with the cost of enlargement that must be resolved.

- The European Security and Defense Identity: NATO has agreed on the importance of realizing the ESDI within NATO and on using the Western European Union as a vehicle for developing the ESDI in concrete terms. But the actual process of doing so, and the larger problem of defining the role of the WEU, remain contentious.

- Counter-Proliferation and Terrorism: The U.S. is eager to see NATO play a role in responding to these issues, while the European Allies are less convinced that the Alliance should be involved. This may

be one of the more significant tensions in NATO in the years ahead, as it brings up questions of the fundamental goals of the Alliance and highlights differing transatlantic perspectives.

- U.S. Technological Gap: A technology and doctrine gap is emerging between U.S. forces and their European counterparts, and the gap is set to widen as the U.S. spends about three times as much on research and development as all European Allies combined. The effects could be a) a divide between the U.S., with a stand-off capability that keeps its forces out of harms way, and the Europeans who are left with “dirtier,” riskier tasks; and/or b) greater or even total European dependence on the U.S.

- Adaptation Issues: Most problems involving NATO’s new command structure, Combined Joint Task Forces, and other post-Cold War institutional adaptation reforms have been resolved, but the “end game” could still produce tensions.

- Greece and Turkey: These nations pose the most serious threat for intra-Alliance conflict, especially as the Greek part of Cyprus prepares to receive advanced surface-to-air missiles while Turkey has vowed to prevent their becoming operational.

- The Balkans: NATO faces very difficult choices over whether and how to respond to violence that could well spread and pull in other nations with ties in the region.

Of course, any number of unexpected changes could produce substantial new stresses for NATO: failure in Kosovo, or a general economic crisis which drives nations to turn inward and reduce cooperation across the board, or conflicting evidence of a resurging major military threat, or events that seriously impair American ability to provide leadership, all could cause more serious tension. The combined longer-term trends of economic integration in Europe even as sub-national regions reassert themselves may leave defense as one of a

smaller number of issues dealt with at the national level, with unpredictable consequences.

But for the moment, the primary task for NATO policy makers is to deal with the less dramatic but important issues described above in such a way as to prevent their growing into more profound tensions. The Alliance is healthy, with revamped institutions and substantial public support. There is every reason to expect that NATO's 50th anniversary summit and celebration in Washington will be an opportunity to reflect on the success of the Alliance in the past while preparing it to sustain that success in the future.

## **Preface**

This paper explores potential sources of tension in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the near and medium terms, defined here as the next five years. It aims at individuals in policy advisory or operational positions who 1) work on NATO issues routinely and who might benefit from a comprehensive look at potential Alliance tensions, or 2) do not work directly on NATO issues but whose jobs require an understanding of Alliance matters.

With such a target audience, I wrote the paper as a policy study rather than an academic treatise. Although I conducted a literature review as background for the paper, the paper itself is based predominantly on interviews at the Ministry of Defense in Bonn; the Ministry of Defense in London; the Ministry of Defense in Paris; the Missions and Delegations of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany at NATO Headquarters in Brussels as well as NATO's International Staff there; the U.S. Embassies in Bonn, London, and Paris; and in various academic settings. The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at the U.S. Air Force Academy funded this research. I also conducted interviews in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff at the Pentagon (not funded by INSS). To encourage frankness and to ensure a policy orientation, I conducted all interviews under conditions of non-attribution by name or post.

I am very grateful for the generous funding provided by INSS that made the paper possible. I deeply appreciate the extraordinary amounts of time offered by busy policy makers and policy advisors during my interviews. Their willingness to share their thoughts, their experience, and their frank assessments provided a rich and thorough basis for this research piece. I also thank, especially, Dr. David Yost of the Naval Postgraduate School for his exceedingly generous and gracious donations of time, reflection, and materials.

With that much help from others, it is much more than a mere formality to add that any gaps or errors of interpretation are entirely my own responsibility. This paper reflects my own views and not those of the U.S. Government, the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Air Force Academy, or INSS.

*JRW*

*Paris, January 1999*